

INTERVIEW WITH KATHY & HUBIE JONES
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Q: Good afternoon. Today is April 4th, 2019. My name is Elizabeth Lund, and I'm here at the Newton Free Library with Kathy and Hubie Jones, civil activists and educators. They have lived in Newton for more than 50 years, and each has had a distinguished career. Together we are participating in the Newton Talks oral history project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. This is part one of my interview with Kathy and Hubie.

Now you grew up in Harlem, and some of your neighbors included Thurgood Marshall and W.E.B. Du Bois, both of whom were officials of the NAACP. That's a very different atmosphere than what you find in Newton. So what appealed to you about coming to Newton and making this place your home?

KJ: Well, they're so, so distinctly different. First of all, the building that I lived in was a 13-story building, and we bought a house that was three stories. So there was a contrast of living in the middle of the city and living in a suburban community. So there was--they were just two different things, I couldn't compare them. So that would be my response to that question.

Q: What year did you and Hubie start looking for a house in Newton?

KJ: When? Let's see, we lived--

HJ: 1961.

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KJ: Yeah. Before that, we were living in Cambridge, before we moved to Newton. And we lived in Cambridge for about five years?

HJ: Two years.

KJ: How many?

HJ: Two or three years.

KJ: Two or three? That's all? And then we--our family was expanding. We decided we needed to go and start our own household and so forth, so that's when we decided to move to Newton.

Q: So were there certain aspects of the city that appealed to you?

KJ: Yes! There was--everything. Everything was appealing. It was not too big. It was--the size of it was important. The transportation--there was public transportation easily accessible. And we were moving to a place which was very close to public transportation of all kinds. So that was part of our decision-making process. The schools were good also. You didn't have to worry about whether you had to send your children to private schools or whether you could use the public schools. So that was another factor.

Q: Did you have trouble finding a realtor who was willing to help you?

KJ: No. We knew what we were--we had a realtor. We had somebody that was selling us our house. So it didn't involve a third party.

HJ: Well that was the second time. But the first time, in 1961, the only way we could have access to seeing a house was through the Newton Fair Housing Association. And the house we saw in West Newton, on Talbot Street, was listed with Fair Housing. And it was through that process that we were able to see the house. And Mr. Marcus--extraordinary man--indicated that he was willing to sell us the house if we were interested. And we were. And we then signed a purchase and sale agreement, and when that became known on the street, people went crazy. They went after Mr. Marcus. They told him to give us back our deposit and not sell us the house. He said he would not do that. He would not do that. We said that we were going to move forward.

And many of the neighbors on the street were members of St. Bernard's Church. They called in the local priest, who sided with them in opposition to us coming. Fortunately, there were some wonderful people who were members of the Catholic Interracial Council who came to our support. And then there was a black couple around the corner, the Houstons, who also were a support. So--but basically it was Ray Marcus, a stand-up guy, who would not be cowered, and who was committed to selling us the house. And we were committed to coming.

And so for a number of years, there was tension with our presence. There was a fireman who lived in the next house who turned red every time he saw us come out. He would go into

apoplexy. So that was our introduction to Newton. But the Newton Fair Housing and Equal Rights organization was absolutely important and pivotal to us getting access to housing.

And then--that was in '61. In '69, with our family expanding, we decided we had to move again. But by that time there was a realtor by the name Mary Ruskin who was wonderful, and she identified the house available where we now live at the corner of Lowell and Commonwealth. And we had no issue at all in buying the house. So things had changed. The neighbors across from us were not happy when we moved into 1087 Commonwealth Avenue, but there was no outright issue in terms of crazy behavior.

Q: Since you were one of the few African American families in Newton at that time, I'm sure that--

KJ: No, there were black people in Newton, but they tended to be in a certain area of Newton, not throughout the whole city. So, there was--

HJ: Yeah, there was a black community that had been in Newton for--

KJ: They call it "the Village."

HJ: There had been a black community in Newton for many years around the Myrtle Baptist Church--Curve Street. And that had been there for years. Many of those people were basically serving the white upper class in West Newton Hills. That's basically how they got employment.

But they were here many years, but it was small and it was pretty much contained. It was not spread throughout the Newton community. So we connected with many of those folks, obviously, once we got settled and got to know people who went to Myrtle Baptist Church. We never were members of Myrtle Baptist Church, but we got to know folks. So it was not that there hadn't been black folks here, but that there had not been black folks all throughout the city. And so we were part of breaking the pattern where realtors would not show houses to folks who wanted to live outside of the Village in West Newton.

Q: Well thank you for sharing that part of history with us, because I think it's something that many people in Newton probably are not aware of, and it is so important to claim those pieces of history and share them. So after you had been here for a few years, you were raising a family in addition to juggling very demanding careers, both of you. What was it like raising children in a community that was predominantly white?

KJ: Well, I would say that for me it wasn't anything new, because I went to a school which was predominantly white with a few people of color in the school and other camps and other experiences. So it was nothing--no big adjustment as far as I was concerned. And there was a community, as I said before, of black people who belonged to a church that was in West Newton. And so we had connections with them as well. And they were welcoming to us, and so it was not a difficult transition to me. Not from my experience--my perspective.

HJ: But of course, black children living in a predominantly white community--we had--my oldest daughter came home one time from nursery school putting white powder all over herself

as she was getting ready for school, because she felt that--she understood she was black. Maybe that wasn't good enough to be accepted in nursery school. It was what all young black kids go through as they try to get an identity in what is basically a white racist society, and where being black is stigmatized. So even if you're in a quote unquote healthy community like Newton, with access to a lot of stuff, you're still going through the process of trying to understand who you are as a black person, what that means in terms of your association with other kids, particularly at certain times. And the job of a parent is to help your children navigate through this.

Now we were fortunate in the '60s for there to be programs--like there was a program at Brandeis started by some black graduate students on the weekend that our kids would go to to learn about black history, black culture, be engaged with other kids of their age. And there were programs beginning in the '60s particularly, when the civil rights revolution hit, where our kids had an opportunity to go into Boston. Kathy was involved in putting together the Roxbury-Newton...

KJ: Freedom School.

HJ: Freedom School! Roxbury-Newton Freedom School.

KJ: So that brought children from Boston to go to Newton and vice versa on alternate months and we have--learn about African American history. And that was very important. I taught at the Boston schools--had an opportunity to teach in a variety of different places when I started as a substitute teacher. So I had a sense of what was going on in the schools, and had a very strong sense that there needed to be some other alternative options for people who would be willing to

send their children to another community to be educated, because I did not feel that the Boston schools were doing an adequate job. So from my starting experience as a teacher in the Boston schools to ending up as a member of the School Committee in Newton, for..I don't know how many years--

HJ: Eight years.

KJ: Eight years? I had a good scope. And had also an opportunity to work with other school systems in the area and do consulting work and so forth, especially around black history and bringing that into the curriculum of these schools.

Q: I wanted to ask you about your time serving on the School Committee, because you were the first African American to serve on Newton School Committee. What perspective did you try to bring to that role?

KJ: That--well, first of all, as an educator I was very interested in making sure the school system was doing a good job of educating kids. So I visited schools and communicated with the directors of the schools and principals and so forth. So that was one thing. And then there was--I think about outreach to people who were interested in seeing changes. And there was some organization--didn't I start with some kind of an organization?--that worked with the principals and with school administrators around the content of the instructional programs, so that they would be aware of what was available to them and how to introduce this material, and having

people coming in and talking about African American history and so forth that becomes an integral part of the curriculum.

Q: Now you were also a founding member of METCO, a 50-year-old program that educated Boston students of color in 35 suburban public school systems. How did living in Newton and raising your own children impact that work?

KJ: Well I think that what impacted that work was the lack of integration in the schools. I feel that it was both important for black children and white children to have a mixed experience. So that was--that came from me, from my experience, and trying to set up ways in which that could happen. And the Freedom School was the first step in that direction in terms of getting parents who were interested in having their children learn more about black history and having that done in an integrated setting, so that the children could come and have interactions with the groups--and going to different places and learning this history. That was the first step. And then moving that along in terms of a larger group and a larger expansion was another important aspect to making change.

HJ: I would also say that Kathy becoming elected to the School Committee became important, because it gave her a perch with some clout, from which to protect the METCO program in Newton. The METCO program in Newton started in 1966, one of seven suburban school systems that agreed to do it. And it was going well. Kathy coordinated the Newton METCO program for the Newton schools for almost 10 years. And near the end of the 10 years, there was some concern that maybe the commitment to the program was not as strong as it could be. And so I

suggested to her, "You should run for the School Committee, because if you are on the School Committee, you'll have a better chance, with some power, to protect this program and to fight for its continued development." And that proved to be the case.

Now, it was interesting that some of the folks who were opponents, that she was running against, labelled her a one-issue candidate. "She's just a one-issue candidate who's only concerned about bringing black kids from Boston into Newton. That's all she's concerned about." That was the rap. Okay? So that we had to develop a platform and a message that indicated, "No, she's a very broad educator, with all of these other kinds of experiences, and it's about education for everybody that she is concerned about. True, she's concerned about the schools having more teachers of color--she's absolutely concerned about the school system having more principals of color, etc. etc. She certainly wants to make sure that schools have more curriculum materials related to the black experience."

KJ: And training with teachers to have some background, so that they could do a more effective job in what they were doing with the young people.

HJ: Yeah, so it was--so the decision to run for School Committee was partially driven by, "Let's get on the School Committee--there's some slippage here around support for this METCO program. And if you win, you'll be in a position to fight with some clout." And it worked! That's the good news. The good news is that it worked.

Q: So over time, you must have seen a lot of changes that really made you feel excited and hopeful about the future, not only for children of color, but for the entire community.

KJ: Well, first of all, I also became a parent of children in the school system, so that gave me kind of like two hats to wear, one as a parent and one as an educator. And then, as I said, I ran for the School Committee, and so I was an elected official. That gave me even more power. But it was a real investment in getting to see--to want to see change, and get people interested in running around the issues that brought people together, widened experiences, took kids to different places so that they could learn from other communities. All of those things were things that I thought were very, very important, and that I was instrumental in getting in place for the curriculum.

Q: Well you mentioned the importance of bringing people together, and that's really a hallmark of the work that both of you have done, as a couple and individually--is that you have brought people together, and you've helped different groups understand one another's perspective. And you've helped people see that making the education system more equitable helps everybody succeed. So you mentioned that you were the mother of Newton school kids, and you were also an educator. Think about both those roles. What were some of the things that have delighted you, over the years? The successes.

KJ: Let's see. Well, one of them is the things that we worked for and thought were important have been--I wouldn't say--I don't know, because I haven't been in touch with it very--except I have grandchildren in the schools...Yeah, it has changed remarkably over the years. So that's a

sense of gratification. And the other piece was this idea that city schools and suburban schools should have more access and familiarity with each other and that children should have more opportunities to visit schools and do things together, with two different schools and two different communities. That was important too. So those are the things that I thought were important educationally and that I was instrumental in implementing.

HJ: Well, a thing that was important personally is our kids got a very good education. Our kids went to the best colleges in America. Our kids went on to have professional careers. That was extraordinarily important. And they did it in a way in which they learned how they could be successful in any environment. Okay? In any environment, whether it was a black environment or a white environment, they learned how to navigate and prosper. Okay?

So I have daughter who's now 56, who's all excited about the fact that she, through Facebook, is bringing together her class from Newton North High School for a big reunion at some hotel in April. And all of these folks that she knew then and has kept up with, lately through social media, are just thrilled to be coming back together again. And she's thrilled to see them.

So the challenge of being black in America is you can be happy and successful and prosper in any context. Okay? You don't have to be in a white context to be happy, you don't have to be in a black context to be happy. You know how to be happy and prosper and to thrive in any context. And that's what you hope will happen for your kids. That's what you hope will happen for all children. Okay? So that's what Newton has meant.

We shouldn't forget that Newton had an extraordinary superintendent by the name of Charles Brown--Chuck Brown. He was an extraordinary human being. He was an extraordinary educator. We first went to Chuck Brown in 1964 to say, "Look, don't you think there's something you can do about having black kids from Boston come into the Newton public schools and get a decent education?" He said "That's a great idea, and it would be a wonderful thing, but I don't have the legal framework to do that. I can't do it, even though I think it's a great idea."

Shortly after that, a black parent and her son--I don't know how she got to me--Mrs. Cook and Ron Cook, came to see us to say, "My kid is a sophomore in high school in Boston, is there any way you can help us get him into the Newton schools?" Well, to make a long story short, we agreed to be his guardian. And so we were his guardian for his last two years at Newton North High School, and he technically lived with us, although he wasn't living with us. But he was with us on weekends and he stayed other times. But that was our first foray into helping a black young man of promise get into the Newton school system and finish high school and prosper. He went on to do very interesting things.

And then, of course, in 1965, here comes Leon Trilling--Dr. Leon Trilling--in Brookline, who comes up with the idea of METCO, of a program that would bring black young people primarily from the Boston public schools into suburban schools--Brookline, Newton, Lexington. There were seven.

KJ: Let's not forget the Freedom Schools. That started before they were able to do that. So you had Freedom Schools in all these different communities and people from those school systems

were coming in contact with people of color, and their experience of that I think was very important. Very important.

HJ: Yes. So Chuck Brown embraced it. He embraced it, and Kathy went to work organizing the community to support METCO coming to Newton. And it was a lot of very hard, tough work. A lot of fabulous, good people joined the effort to make it happen. And there were community meetings where people would get up and say, "We have no--we're sorry for the problems in the Boston public schools. We have no responsibility for that. Newton schools are for Newton kids only." And so we had that sentiment to deal with. But I would say the leadership of Chuck Brown was important to use this mobilizing of citizens in Newton to ultimately get the School Committee to agree to have METCO to be a part of Newton in the first round. And he also--he and his wife, Nancy, became host parents, because there was a whole system where you had host parents, because there was--what did we call it?

KJ: Well the kids had to eat in school or they went home--the kids obviously couldn't go home for lunch. So--

HJ: Single session.

KJ: So they moved it to having kids at school eat their lunch--they would bring their lunch--

HJ: So there were host parents that would take these kids in for lunch, and support them through their own educational process. Chuck and Nancy Brown were host parents. So they made it quite

clear to everybody in the city they were putting their own personal family and their own personal stuff in support of this program. And it's an example that leadership does matter. Leadership does matter. And as a result, as you know, METCO has grown now into 3,300 kids every day going to 33 suburban school systems. It is the strongest metropolitan educational infrastructure in the history of the United States--nothing like it. Nothing like it.

My only concern is--and sorrow is--that it was never used. It was never used to advance metropolitan education in a big creative way, where we would get real movement of kids back and forth between school systems. There was an attempt to do it with an organization--to try to get metropolitan education going, but it failed on the basis of class and race, so it never really happened. But anyway, it's the strongest metropolitan education infrastructure in the history of the country. Nothing close. Nothing close.

Q: Again, thank you for sharing that part of history, because I think many people in Newton don't realize that there were host families, and there was--

KJ: There had to be host families, because the kids had to have someplace to go to eat! So that was part of the program--if you were gonna be part of it, that was part of what you had to do.

HJ: But the host families were also going into Boston to the meetings.

KJ: That's right! It was reciprocal. It was interesting.

HJ: [00:33:04] house in Boston to meetings of--METCO meetings, where you had this interaction and flow back and forth. So--this is the benefit.

KJ: And the families did things together. A lot of them, things--do things with the kids in the program that--we would go--in the program. So it was good for everybody. A lot of people learned from having that experience, and more people were hired--people of color were hired by school systems in suburban communities as well as in Boston communities. So it was good--innovative.

Q: You mentioned the word "leadership." And as I listen to the two of you speak, it is very clear to me that leadership has been important in every part of your endeavors, because you had to show leadership, and then you had to reach out and connect with other leaders, and create a framework for success in Newton, and a framework that would also extend outside of Newton. When you think about leadership, what does that word mean to you? Why do you think you have been good leaders here in Newton?

HJ: Well, for me it starts with how I was raised. I was raised in the South Bronx, in New York City. I had a father who was a Pullman porter for 45 years of his life. Probably the smartest individual I ever knew. [Sirens sound in the background, laughter] We have some competition. And he graduated as valedictorian from Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. Wanted to be a doctor. Ended up in the Pullman company because as a student, he substituted for men in the summer who were on vacation. And of course for black men at that time, in 1919, the good jobs were in the Pullman company or in the post office. And so since he got married and his

chances of going to medical school were gone, he used his brains with--volunteered with his union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, run by A. Philip Randolph, the dean of black leaders. So--and what he did was, he would--he was a legal advocate. Porters would get charged with messing with a passenger or stealing or whatever. They were being brought up before the union board, and he would take their cases, and he'd write briefs, and he'd represent them. And he was very good at it. And downtown New York lawyers didn't believe that a non-lawyer had written these briefs, and were putting him on the carpet as they were going through this testimony. So A. Philip Randolph was known in my house as "the Chief." "The Chief says, the Chief says, the Chief says, the Chief says." He was a very important figure for my father, and of course for me as I was growing up. And I understood Mr. Randolph to be a very, very powerful leader. Okay?

So I came up knowing that we had a responsibility to give back. Okay? We had a responsibility to give back. We had a responsibility to make life better for folks of color in this country, and to fight for our rights. And I was very fortunate when I was in college to have Dr. Kenneth Clark as my psychology teacher--my introductory psychology course. Kenneth Clark was at that time--he was leading a group of social scientists in putting together a social science brief for the Brown vs. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas. And he came in and told the class, "Well, I'm doing this. We're putting together all the social science data that we could have so we can make the case that to segregate young people on the basis of race is psychologically damaging to black kids. Here's the brief, what do you think? Read it. What do you think?" And we were like, "Oh!" For a 19-year-old kid, "Woah, wow!" Reading this thing and talking about it and discussing it.

And then Dr. Clark came in one day and said, "Look, Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund is not sure they will take this brief to the court, because the United States Supreme Court has never accepted a social science brief. And they're afraid it's going to muddy the waters here. So we don't know--the brief is done, you see it, we've discussed it, but we're not sure it's gonna go to the court." So then one day he comes in, he says, "We're going to the court! They're gonna take it to the court." And of course when the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that--it outlawed segregation in public schools, they cited the brief, saying that it was psychologically damaging to separate black kids.

So I saw in Dr. Clark a scholar who used his intellectual gifts and commitment to try to make a difference for folks--for black people as well as white people--who was committed to making a difference. And so he was a giant model for me. He was a giant model for me. And then I had A. Philip Randolph, and there were others. And I would say that by the time I got to college and through college, I was clear that I wanted to be a leader. I wanted to be a person who could--who would make a difference. I had no idea what that would mean. I had no idea how that would happen. But I knew--I had one powerful experience when I was in high school when I ran to be vice president of the student organization, and I was swept into office. And I knew what it felt like to be a leader and to play a role in changing a high school as a student. So I had this notion in my head, and it was helped along by Clark.

And then of course when I was a graduate student in social work--I came to Boston to go to graduate school in social work, that's how I got here--and in my second year at BU School of Social Work, I went to Ford Hall Forum to hear Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak. He was in the

middle of the Montgomery bus boycott at that time. It wasn't clear that he would be able to keep this commitment, but the word came down about a week before that yeah, he's coming. This new figure who had just been catapulted onto the national scene. So I got there very early so I could get in and get a seat, and I did. And Dr. King walked onto the stage and launched into an oratory that blew me away. Just blew me away. And I would say that that was the night that I made the commitment to work for social justice. And I left Jordan Hall, walking down Huntington Avenue to get the bus back to Cambridge where I was staying as a student, and I felt like I was levitating. It was crazy. I felt like my feet weren't even touching the ground. I was so pumped up, so enthused. And never happened again, thank goodness. But I would say that--so that was an important piece. That was an important piece of my social development.

And I had the good fortune of working at the Ethical Culture School Camp in Cooperstown, New York, where I met Kathy. And this was a very--the Ethical Culture Society, which ran the schools, was a very humanistic religion, basically, committed to social justice, ethics--ethical culture. And this was a community--a camp community, co-ed camp community. I first was a dishwasher then I was a counselor for six or seven years. But it was the only community I have probably ever lived in where race was neutral. Now race is never neutral in America, don't get me wrong, okay. But it was a place where it didn't matter what your race was or what your social class was or what your gender was. It was a place where you were accepted based upon your human attributes. If you were good, you were good. If you were crazy, you were crazy. If you were--you know, you were just accepted for who you were. And it was a very powerful experience. So that was a part of my development. And so--I don't know if that answers your question.

Q: It does.

HJ: I don't know if that answers your question, but that's sort of what happened. And then when the civil rights movement exploded in Boston, I got very involved and led a general strike in 1963. Shut the city down for a day to protest all forms of racial discrimination. And we were going for that.

KJ: My story comes from another--a different perspective, and that is that I grew up in Harlem. And there was a school that was founded by a black woman, and it was called The Modern School. And she had graduated--she was a Smith graduate, and she started this school and my mother decided that that's where she wanted me to go. And so that's--it was a school for black kids, and it was a good private school with small classes. Most of the teachers were of color--black people. And I was--the woman who founded the school was a Smith graduate, and she thought it was important that there be some opportunities for black children to have a very good, substantial education. Public schools were for the most part segregated on the basis of where you lived is where you went. And so the schools that they were going to weren't good. So this was that.

And so when my mother found out about this school, that's where I went from kindergarten through high school--from kindergarten through when they stopped in sixth grade, and then to the Ethical Culture schools which were--the school was founded by somebody who graduated from Smith College. And so that was how I got my beginnings of exposure to the community

and what was available and what could be and what should be. I never thought I'd end up teaching. It wasn't on my program, but that's what happened. So that was a good thing. I'm really pleased that I did do the work that I did in all these levels of education and teaching and exploration. So.

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This concludes the first part of my interview with Kathy and Hubie.

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Q: This is part two of my interview with Kathy and Hubie. So welcome back. Your stories are so powerful, and I love the idea of you having a moment where you realize what you were meant to do in life. And you said that Kathy was willing to join you in that journey. But it must have felt in some ways that you really--that there was so much that had to be done. You were taking on the world. How did you maintain your commitment and inspiration through the hard times?

HJ: Well, first of all, the work that we've done was embraced by others who had the same commitment for change, the same commitment to have the kind of human communities that we treasured. And doing this work we met extraordinary people, and became lifelong friends, in many cases. And it was with that commitment that we were able to build action systems that were large enough and powerful enough to get change.

I recently last year was interviewed for over a year by some former colleagues of mine--went through my whole life and tried to figure out what are the leadership lessons. And I was at--at those discussions, I realized that one of the things that I ultimately had was the power to convene

others. I had enough--I earned enough social capital and enough credibility and enough of a reputation that when there was a problem that had to be solved, when there was a need--urgent need that had to be addressed, I could call people together, and they would come. And then I realized from this work that I also learned how to be a good convener--how to keep people in a room long enough to figure out how to solve a problem, and how to move forward in a way that would be successful. For me, that meant that I ended up forming and meeting as many as 25 nonprofit service organizations in the Boston community. And it basically grew out of the fact that I'd call people together and we said, "Okay, this [00:50:44] this had to be done." In some cases it meant you had to form a new organization that would be there for a long time that would have resources and could be sustained. And so out of that came a whole lot of organizations. And it was through those organizations that things happened.

My point of view is that--I've said to my students, social work students, and others over the years is: first of all you have a vision about what kind of a society you want to have. You have a real clear vision. And you then have a commitment to try to play a role in making that happen. Okay? Because that's what drives you. And if the vision isn't exciting and the vision isn't engaging, you won't stay through the tough times. Because no matter what you're trying to build, there always are going to be tough times. There's always gonna be the fight for resources. There's always gonna be people misunderstanding what you're doing, ba-da-da-da da. So you have to have a clear vision. And you have to use any means you have to make that happen.

So for instance, I've always wanted to find a way to bring young people together across the divides of race and ethnicity and social class and have authentic social integration. Not

desegregation, but social integration. Well, in 2000, I heard the Chicago Children's Choir sing in Chicago, and here it was. Here was a high school group of kids singing at a level of excellence--a diverse group of kids. And I said, "Here's the model. And we ought to try it in Boston." Now I'm not a musician. I did sing when I was younger and all the rest, but I'm not a musician. Some of my kids think it's a real joke I founded a children's chorus, right, of all things. But I did it--now, I learned that I didn't know a lot about this, and I had to learn a lot about music and choral and all that kind of stuff. And I had to bring in people who knew this stuff. But my reason for doing it was to bring kids together across these divides, and to use the power of singing for social justice and social integration. So it's an example of what I've tried to do all along --that you should use whatever means is necessary to get to do the things that are important to get done. And in times that means getting outside of your comfort zone. So for me to form the Boston' Children's Chorus meant really getting out of my comfort zone, because I didn't know what the hell I was doing, really, when it comes to music. But I did have this model, this powerful model from Chicago. So we started with 300 kids in 2003--we started with 30 kids, excuse me, with 30 kids in 2003. We now have over 500 kids and 13 choirs. The top kids sing at an extraordinary excellence. They start at age seven, they graduate, go on to high school. Ninety percent of them--no matter where they come from, Roxbury, Newton, Wellesley, wherever--ninety percent of them go on to college. And we are...and they travel internationally as ambassadors for the city and for the country. So they've been to Japan, they've been to Cambodia, they've been Vietnam, they've been to Jordan in collaboration with King Abdullah. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, okay. And so these kids also now know that they are global citizens. So they know they're global citizens, and we say to them, "When you get to college, at least take one semester if not two semesters abroad. Because you'll never understand America unless you get outside of it and look

back at it through the eyes of other people. You won't have a clue. You just won't have a clue."

So we now--I now get emails from these kids--they're not kids anymore, they're young adults--from all over the place, and they are everywhere doing very interesting things. "Hey, send me some money, Hubie! We're doing some good stuff over here!" So anyway, that's--so the point is, is that you're clear about your mission and you just pursue it any way necessary.

KJ: So let me say that my--I guess my plan was never to be an educator. That was not on my agenda. But I think what prompted me to go into education was seeing what was going in the Boston schools, because there was--I was there working, I could see that it wasn't doing anything at all of any importance for young people. And so that's what got me started going to graduate school and getting some information, because I took no courses in college--I was gonna be a social worker. That was my plan. And then I started looking at what was happening in Boston, and it needed to be changed. And then we had pretty good schools in Newton. And there were models that I learned from visiting and being involved with my own children's education. So that was the framework from which I started and continued to work at all levels of education to bring minority people into the picture in terms of the curriculum, and to encourage other people to go into education and bring what they could to that, and bring people together--to work together, learn together, and to have experiences together. So.

HJ: So Kathy was gonna be a social worker--

KJ: That's right.

HJ: --and I originally thought I was going to be an educator. But I decided I was gonna become a social worker. And so I got involved in becoming a educational advocate, so by a fluke, through my social work--so when I was running the Roxbury Multi-Service Center in 1968, we had parents coming to us whose children had been bounced out of the Boston public school system. The school system said they were too retarded or too disruptive, et cetera, et cetera, to be in school--don't bring them back. And so we had lots of these kids coming and families coming. And of course we had these kids evaluated by our mental health team at the center, which found out in 85 percent of cases, the kids were not disturbed, not retarded, could function in a regular classroom situation if something decent was happening in classrooms. So with all of this diagnostic data we'd go back to the schools and say, "You know, this is what you can do to help this child do well." In some cases we raised private dollars to get these kids into private schools, because the schools were just too destructive.

So we did that for a few years, and then social case workers landed in my office and said, "Hey Hubie, as fast as we do this work, the Boston public school system spews out into the community a whole group of other kids. This is a systemic problem. Now you like jacking up people, so why don't you just go--we don't do that, but why don't you just go and jack up the Boston public schools, and--this has to be solved, this is a systemic problem." So out of that we formed the Task Force on Children Out of School, which we brought together a group of very interesting people--professionals--lawyers, psychiatrists, psychologists, parents, and so forth. And we did a study. And we found out that there were 10,000 kids who had been excluded from school. And when that broke across the front pages of the Boston Globe and the Herald, the American and all that, Boston was stunned. So we had lifted a condition, an awful condition that had lived for a

long time, to the level of social problem. And fortunately, Speaker of the House David Bartley was getting interested in the special education issue. And he called us up and said, "Hey, send me a copy of the report--*The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston*. Send me a copy--send me 500 copies. I want to give it to the legislature, I want to give it to groups I'm associated with--" which we did. And then he said, "Come in. I want you to help me write some legislation to deal with special needs kids. And we did. And out of that work came Chapter 766--the special education law in Massachusetts, which guaranteed that all kids with special needs would be educated within the mainstream of the school system, and that the resources needed to do that would be made available. And where a child was too disturbed or whatever, and needed private schooling, that that would be made available as well. Okay?

So this social worker suddenly gets catapulted into education reform stuff. And so I've been involved in education reform stuff, and Task Force on Children out of School became the Mass. Advocates for Children, which is about to celebrate its 50th year in October or November. Okay? It's been sustained that long, and it has dealt with issues of autism, it's dealt with issues of gender inclusivity--you name it. But it's--and charter schools and so forth and so on. So it's another example where I was doing my social work, human service work, and by virtue of a problem arising, I convened, and out of that convening, ended up a law that changed state policy. And Marian Wright Edelman, who was then working at the Harvard Center for Law and Education, was so inspired by this work, she went ahead and formed the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C. And I was on the board for a couple of years. Okay? So out of a small little agency, relatively small agency in Roxbury, by doing smart, strategic social action, we were able

to change not only state policy, but two years after Chapter 766, the national law was enacted by the US Congress.

That's just an example of where you get led--the bottom line is, you have no idea where your life journey is going to take you. You don't have a clue. You think you know what's on your dance card, you think you know what you want to be on your dance card, but you better be open to considering doing other things if you are called to do it. If you are called to do it. And sometimes you're called to do it when you don't want to do it. So I was called to go be interim president of Roxbury Community College in 1992, when I was dean of the School of Social Work at BU. I had enough on my plate. And I had a whole lot of kids in college and everything else, alright? And it turned out to be that there was nobody else to do it. And so John Silber, the president of BU, said, "Okay, you can go do it. But I'm not putting a new dean at the School of Social Work. You say you have a great management team--you come here a half day a week, that's fine. And we'll pay you a salary, because I know you're not gonna--you don't want to take a salary cut." I said, "You got that right." But of course, could a private university pay a president of a public college without it being a conflict of interest? This was a big to-do. We had to go before the ethics committee, and there was a whole lot of stuff, bah, bah, bah, making sure...But anyway, the point is that I had to do it. Fortunately I saved the college. I saved the college, and I had a whole lot of great people who came to help me save it, because I couldn't do it by myself. But it was not on my dance card, it was the last thing--the last thing my wife wanted to hear. I'm already on two--already at the School of Social Work...It's the same thing. Now, she's been involved in Roxbury Community College on her own. There was a whole set of studies she was involved in one summer. So it was not like she wasn't committed to what this was about. But it

was just another example that...and I tell young people who I mentor, is that sometimes you're gonna be called to do work you don't want to do. And if you say--

KJ: [01:06:58] to be called upon to get people to do things that they aren't doing, so that you go and look in schools and you see the curriculum is stuck then that's an important way to get in to be able to work with the staff and get them to make the changes that are necessary for all of our children to have a better educational experience.

Q: You have mentioned several important things about leadership--being open to where you are called, not outlining the kind of work that you need to do, and looking for where you can solve a problem. And it seems very clear that both of you have that approach, and you are both very committed to making the world more just for everybody. But Kathy, as Hubie was talking about some of the things he's done, and some of the things that you have done as well--did you have any clue when you got married that your life was gonna go down this path?

KJ: Are you kidding? No idea. As I said, I had no thought about doing anything in the educational system at all. As I said, it was brought about by seeing what was not happening. And having had--I must say--I don't know if I mentioned this before--but I was very fortunate, because I went to an independent school that was started by somebody who had had a good opportunity in school to be able to use that model in putting a school together for black kids and the black community. And that was really pretty impressive. She graduated from Smith College, and started The Modern School. And that was significant, because I think it was also an incentive for other people to start schools, independent schools for black children in other areas of the

country. And unfortunately, there was still a need, even though--the schools haven't really improved that much. There's been a continual need for having some independent schools that can get kids ready to go onto college and prepare for the world--their role in the world.

HJ: Well...so obviously we didn't know how this was going to play out over the 61 years we've been married. 61 years?

KJ: We have? 61 years?

HJ: 61 years. It is 61 years.

KJ: That's a long time.

HJ: So I think Kathy knew that I had some crazy idea in my head that I would exert leadership.

KJ: That you were gonna do what?

HJ: Exert leadership somewhere. I mean, I talked a long time about maybe wanting to running the Urban League, the National Urban League. You know, I just had these ideas as a young guy. It was a lot of nonsense. But anyway--so she knew that I had this idea that at some point I wanted to give back, and sometimes I wanted to make a difference. I also knew that she was committed to change, and wanted to see other people have as great an experience as she had had in life. And we both were committed to making a better world. And how that was going to play

out, I don't think we knew, but we--I'm not surprised that she ended up helping to found METCO and being on the School Committee. I'm not surprised at all, even though I never knew how it was going to happen. But I think we basically both came--had models. She had models in her own house, in her own apartment building. Okay? And they were very close, who she saw making a difference in the world. And I had my own experiences with my father and A. Philip Randolph, Dr. Clark and so forth.

At the end of the day, it's about whether you are willing to make a lifelong commitment to change. So I have students who--I used to teach advocacy courses that my social work students, they'd get all jazzed up and they were gonna change everything, bah, bah, bah. And I would tell them, "Hey listen, it's a lifelong commitment." If you're talking about changing a public school system, an urban public school system, it is a lifelong commitment. It's not in one day and out the next. It's a lifetime commitment. If you're talking about changing the prison system in America, it's a lifelong commitment. Okay? And some of these social work students--I said, "First thing you do is go in and change the social agencies you're working at. Because half of them aren't doing the right thing in terms of the folks they're serving. So before you start telling me about how you're gonna change the Pentagon, you tell me how you're going to change this child welfare agency you're at, or whatever it is. So that--so you start there."

So you start there, and from there it builds and you build social capital and you're clear that you're building it. And then you have to decide how you spend it. So I'm 85, I have still a lot of extraordinary young people who I mentor, and I share my social capital with them, because I can't take it to the grave. So I share my social capital. So I have--I'm in a wonderful position of

being able to decide how I spend it. But I better spend it. But I better spend it, because I can't take it to the grave, right? And so I have a lot of young people who come and want to be mentored and a lot of it is they want me to vouch for them. They want me to share my social capital with them, which I'll do if they're doing the right thing, if they're committed to the right thing, if they're for real. If they're not, I won't. And I'll tell them I won't and why I won't. So we've still had a good time just watching young people grow up.

KJ: Plus the fact that we did have--raise eight kids somehow.

HJ: Yeah, just a little job.

Q: I wanted to ask you about that.

HJ: Just a little job. Just a little job on the side.

KJ: And how many grandchildren do we have?

HJ: 11.

KJ: 11.

Q: So can we talk about parenting for a minute? Because for many people, changing the world means starting right in their very own homes, with their kids or with relatives or spouses. When

you were building your home, what were some of the things that you taught your kids about being leaders or being successful in every area?

HJ: Well there were a lot of meetings at our house. Kathy was doing her organizing of the METCO program. These people were coming in to organize, so our kids were sitting there listening and--

KJ: Yeah, that's right.

HJ: And watching, you know. When she was running for--when I was running for Congress, our kids were involved. When she was running for School Committee, our kids were involved. So--

KJ: And their parents--our friends--our children's friends' parents also became involved in a lot of the things that we were doing.

HJ: So they saw a lot. Now, one of the challenges obviously is we're very busy, so I tell the story of the day that my daughter Cheryl, who's now a professor in education, she was ten years old and we were sitting at the dinner table, and she says, "Hey dad, are you a workaholic?" And I danced, I didn't know what to do with this. I was like, "Oh, where's this coming from?" And I said, "Why, did I not come to your play or did I not--" She said, "No, you're working all the time! That's why I asked the question. You're working all the time." Okay? So I had to think about this. So you can--you have to be clear that all of this work, no matter how great it is, it can't get in the way of supporting your kids in every way they need to be supported. So that they

don't feel that they're not having as much access to you as you need. So that's one of the challenges. That's one of the challenges.

The other challenge is that we never really understood--at least I never really understood--is that it's sometimes difficult for a child to have a parent who is a public figure. Okay? Because they don't want to be seen through their parents. They want to be seen as their own person. So I once had a daughter of mine said to somebody--they had said, "Hubie Jones's daughter." And she said, "No! I'm not his daughter." And I said, "She said what?! She said what?!" Okay? Well, it was basically she wanted not to be seen and known through her parents. She wanted to be known for her own--based on her own stuff, her own skills, her own knowledge, her own everything. So sometimes we forget how difficult it can be for children who have public parents. Who are seen publicly--I was on television for 20 years, on *Five on Five*. So I was very public every Saturday--every Sunday morning. And...so that's a piece. That's a piece. Okay?

And my wife is a little--sort of gets a chuckle sometimes I think, because these young people I'm now mentoring, I ask them, "What's your self-care program? What are you doing to take care of yourself? I know about all this great stuff you're doing, but what is your self-care program so you don't burn out." Okay? And fortunately I had a wife who was good enough to stop me in my tracks when I needed to pull back and have self-care. And one grand example was--is that we now have three timeshares in Hilton Head, South Carolina. And when we bought the first one, I was saying "Nah, we're not spending money, nah." She says, "No. No. We wanna have--we need to have a place where we're gonna go and--you know, go every summer. And I'm not gonna have to hear about you going to some silly meeting in Boston. Okay? It's not gonna be in the Cape, or

the Vineyard, it's gonna be in Hilton Head, South Carolina." Well that turned from one timeshare to three timeshares, we could stretch it out to be three weeks. And we've been doing it for over 30 years. Okay? Because she understood that we had to be able to pull back. And if you don't pull back, you're gonna--you'll lose your way. You'll lose your way no matter how much good stuff you think you're doing, how much you're saving the world or whatever the hell it is. So I think that's--that's important.

Now you'll also learn along the way how to do it in better ways. You learn--I learned too late that you don't have to sit in some of these endless meetings, because you're not--in many of them you're not making a difference by being there. Okay? Now some meetings you have to be there even if you're not making any big contribution because your presence is indicating you're committed to what's being done. But in many cases, you don't have to be there. I learned too late that the more I get into a meeting, I ask a question: Would anything be different here if I wasn't here? And if I find out it isn't, I slowly get out and leave. So that--you've gotta learn that you don't waste your time in so many civic meetings when it's really not taking you anywhere. Or when you--your time and what you know, it's not helping to make a difference. So I learned that too late. I learned too late that you need to take a nap between 12 and 1 o'clock. Because by 12 or 1 o'clock, you are working over fatigue. You don't know you're working over fatigue, which means you're not listening as well as you think you're listening. You're probably making decisions you shouldn't be making. And so when I was the Dean of the School of Social Work I ended up having a couch and I'd go out for a half an hour at least, in order to be real with myself. That's what Winston Churchill did, that's what A. Philip Randolph did, that's what other great leaders did. They took naps! Me, I think taking a nap is like treating me like a baby. So there

were these things that I learned about how you can be more effective. And hopefully I've conveyed this to the young people that I mentor, who are better than I ever could be, because this young crowd is so much better educated than I was. They have access to this media, this technology. And they have analytical skills that I never had when I started out. So they have all of this potential. Do they have the drive? Do they have the commitment to be change-agents? Do they have the commitment to collaborate with other people?

Q: You mentioned in the first part of our interview that you and Kathy raised your kids to be successful and to prosper in any environment. And I'm sure that you were helping your students and all of the people you've mentored over the years learn to become that effective as well. What are some of the ideas that you shared with people to help them become successful?

HJ: Well, first of all, if you're a black young person, you have to come to grips with the fact that you're angry.

KJ: That you're what?

HJ: Angry. That you have anger. And that you're angry about what's going on in this society, or not going on in this society, or not going on in the world. You're angry. And the challenge you have is how do you use that anger as a source of energy to create constructive change. So that's--so I have a young man now who thought--he was concerned about his anger. "I'm an angry young man." I said, "Fine! I get it. You can't live in America without being angry. And in fact if you're not angry every once in a while--a couple times a week, you're probably in danger

of losing your mental health. So the question is not that you're angry--but be clear about the sources of it and so forth--but how do you take that and turn it to energy to get constructive things done?" So we were fortunate that we were able to know that we could--that we were angry, we were perturbed, or whatever, and that we were gonna just take that as a source of energy, move ahead, get something done. And not to just flail all over the place. Now to deny I'm angry would get me into trouble. To deny I'm angry would get me into trouble, because I would be disconnected from reality. So that's what I tell young people. Gotta be angry? Fine - I get it. But what are you gonna do with it? What are you gonna do with it that's gonna make a difference? What are you gonna do with it that's not gonna make you crazy? What are you gonna do with it that's gonna not have you have healthy relationships with your family, or whatever? So I don't know if that's answering your question or not.

Q: Yes, and that was a fantastic answer. So we are almost out of time. Is there one more thing that you would like to share with listeners?

KJ: Don't give up. I think that's probably the most important thing, is to be able to recoup your energy and to direct it at the things that you want to see changed. Because it can be very frustrating and debilitating, because there are so many things that need to be worked on. But if you can focus on one thing and see if you can get that--work together to be alleviated in some way, I think that's probably the most important thing.

HJ: I would say that it's extraordinarily important--if you're going to raise a family well, it's absolutely important to have a very good partner. I don't know how single parents do it, because

I know there were times when I was suggesting that something should be done regarding our kids, which was a wrong thing. And Kathy would say, "Woah, back up! Wait. Hold on. Let's rethink this. This may not be--" And in most cases she was right. And there were times when she wanted to do something, I'd say, "Hey, woah, woah, woah. Wait a minute. Wait a minute, I think we ought--"

KJ: Well, I can't remember--

HJ: Oh yeah, right. [Laughter] Oh, yeah.

KJ: He's just making it up.

HJ: Yeah, right. I'm making it up. So you need to have the balance, okay? The balance of each other to keep each other from--I just don't know how anybody does it alone. I don't know how anybody does it alone. And then if you're really lucky, your kids are really lucky, they have grandparents who can listen to them when their parents are not treating them right or whatever it is! They have a grandparent with a listening ear who can help guide them and give them help. That's what it takes. That's what it takes. So I just don't know how we have these single parent households right now, where one parent is trying to do it all by themselves, and in many cases they're relying on grandparents who are already tired and old to do something they can't really do. And we've got a situation in the black community where 40 percent of African American males are either in jail or under the control of the criminal justice system. So there's no normal family formation. And if you don't have normal family formation, the chances of these kids,

children, being raised and supported to be the best they can be is compromised. So we were lucky. We were lucky. We were good partners. And I was--kept doing things and I was--kept running off and trying to save the world at times when I should not save the world. I fortunately didn't get elected to the United States Congress, which I desperately wanted to be a US Congressman. My wife really was not for it. I really didn't listen to her. She was a good soldier. And the good news is I lost, and if I had won, I probably would be divorced now. Yeah, I mean--because being a Congressman is crazy. So...yeah. So...what can I say? That's it.

Q: Well that is all very good advice, and I really love what Kathy said about don't--give--up. That and all of the comments that you have shared today are so important for listeners today and also for people who will be listening to your stories 100 years from now.

HJ: Okay. Alright.

Q: So thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. We are really happy to be able to include you in the Newton Talks Oral History Project.

HJ: Glad to be here.

KJ: Thank you. Good to be here.

END OF INTERVIEW